

## The Art of Philosophy: The Use of Dialogue in Halevi's *Kuzari* and Abravanel's *Dialoghi D'Amore*

Aaron W. Hughes  
*University of Calgary*

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### Abstract

The goal of this study is twofold. First, it presents, as far as I am aware, the first comparison of two of the most literary-minded thinkers in the Jewish philosophical tradition, Judah Halevi (1075–1141) and Judah Abravanel (ca. 1465–after 1521). And, in so doing, it seeks to contribute to the emerging discussion concerning the various secondary forms of Jewish philosophy, showing how genres other than the standard philosophical treatise played just as important a role in the articulation of philosophical ideas and probably an even greater role when it came to disseminating such ideas. Too often the study of medieval Jewish philosophy focuses on content at the expense of form, thereby marginalizing issues of literary creativity and aesthetic effect. By putting such issues at the center we can ascertain not only the relationship between philosophy and literature, but also examine the ways in which the literary structure of a philosophical treatise contributes to the main argument.

### Keywords

Abravanel, Judah; aesthetics; dialogue, genre of; Halevi, Judah; Islam; Isma'ilism; Judaism; philosophy and literature; polemics; Renaissance humanism

The literary dialogue was one of several forms that Jewish thinkers employed to articulate their philosophical programs in both the medieval and early modern periods. This form conveniently allowed an author to present a particular argument, raise a number of counterarguments to it, and subsequently refute such counterarguments. The dialogue thereby provided a natural venue for the philosophical enterprise. An examination reveals that philosophical dialogues penned by Jews tended to be composed at times when this genre was relatively popular in the non-Jewish cultures in which Jews found themselves. In these dialogues, then, we witness not only a Jewish response to non-Jewish philosophical and literary trends but also a convenient narrative setting whereby we can get a better

sense of the production of Jewish philosophy.<sup>1</sup> An analysis of these dialogues reveals that they should not be read solely for the ideas contained within; rather, these ideas tend to constellate around a number of formal, aesthetic, and rhetorical features. These features, far from secondary, often help to illumine the contents of the works in question.

What follows is a case study that analyzes two of the best-known and dynamic Jewish philosophical dialogues: the *Kuzari* by Judah Halevi (1075-1141) and the *Dialoghi d'amore* by Judah Abravanel (ca. 1465-after 1521). Although composed in distinct Jewish cultures,<sup>2</sup> medieval Islami-cate and Renaissance Italian, respectively, these two dialogues nonetheless provide striking, though ultimately opposed, paradigms of Jewish responses to non-Jewish cultures. Since each composition only makes full sense when situated within its local setting, my intention is not to compare and contrast the two dialogues.<sup>3</sup> By bringing these two works together, however, I

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<sup>1</sup> I am well aware of the problems inherent in using the term "Jewish philosophy." For a useful discussion, see the comments in Daniel H. Frank, "What is Jewish Philosophy?" in *Routledge History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1997), 1-10. By "Jewish philosophy," I simply mean the reading of the authoritative sources of Judaism in light of the vocabulary and categories imported from philosophy. So although the particular datum of Jewish philosophy, for example, the Hebrew Bible, has not changed, the forms of philosophy used to interpret it have. Since philosophy is not a Jewish invention, but tended to be imported from the larger cultural contexts in which Jews lived, the particular philosophical systems used to elucidate Judaism and Jewish sources were (and still are) dependent upon larger intellectual currents found in various temporal, spatial, and geographic contexts.

<sup>2</sup> In using the term "Jewish cultures," I am influenced by the discussion in Efraim Shmueli, *Seven Jewish Cultures: A Reinterpretation of Jewish History and Thought*, trans. Gila Shmueli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). He writes, for example: "By culture I mean a set of shared symbols which represent an organized collective attempt to express the meaning, or meanings, of life and to make the world habitable by transforming its impersonal vastness and frightening dimensions into an understandable and significant order" (ibid., 3). In Judaism, these "shared symbols" include God, Torah, and chosen-ness; yet, for Shmueli, while "these concepts have endured, their meanings have changed, the inevitable result of the changes occurring in the ontologies underlying these concepts and experiences" (ibid., 4). To this discussion of Jewish cultures should also be added the essays in *The Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> This is not to say, however, that there are not certain historical filiations between the two works. For instance, Abravanel would have known and read Halevi's *Kuzari* in the Hebrew translation of Judah ibn Tibbon (1120-90). On the reception history of the *Kuzari* in the Italian Renaissance, consult Adam Brian Shear, "The Later History of a Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in the Reception of Judah Halevi's *Sefer ha-Kuzari*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 171-340.

hope to demonstrate why two particular thinkers—one in the Middle Ages and the other in the Renaissance—found in the dialogue a convenient vehicle to express their ideas. An analysis will reveal that both Halevi and Abravanel utilized and made interesting use of the generic features of the dialogue as a means to respond to larger philosophical and literary trends.

An additional aim of this study is to contribute to the emerging discussion concerning the “secondary forms” of Jewish philosophy<sup>4</sup> by showing

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The *Kuzari* had already become by the fifteenth century a timeless classic of the Jewish intellectual canon. Arthur Lesley, for example, argues that this century witnessed the rise of a “Hebrew Humanism” in Italy that regarded Hebrew as the original classical language to compete with the non-Jewish humanist interest in classical literature and style. Moreover, he argues that one of the central models for this centrality of Hebrew was found in Halevi’s *Kuzari*. See Arthur M. Lesley, “Jewish Adaptation of Humanist Concepts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Italy,” in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 48. This imagining of the *Kuzari* as a Jewish alternative to the classical sources of non-Jewish humanists, according to Shear, subsequently led to the work becoming an instrumental part in the construction of a Jewish canon in Renaissance Italy. See Shear, “The Later History of a Medieval Hebrew Book,” 173.

Moreover, increasingly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, many Jewish intellectuals turned to the *Kuzari* as a philosophical alternative to the Aristotelianism presented in the rationalist tradition of Maimonides. In this regard, see Judah Moscato, *Kol Yehuda* (Warsaw: n.p., 1880). For requisite secondary literature, see I. Bettan, *Studies in Jewish Preaching* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939), 192-225; and Isaac E. Barzilai, *Between Reason and Faith: Anti-Rationalism in Italian Jewish Thought* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), 167-91. More recently, see Shear, “Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari* in the Haskalah: The Reinterpretation and Reimagining of a Medieval Work,” in *Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture: From al-Andalus to the Haskalah*, ed. Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 71-92; and Shear, “Judah Moscato’s Scholarly Self-Image and the Question of Jewish Humanism,” in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 149-77.

<sup>4</sup> In using the term “secondary forms,” I follow the lead of James T. Robinson, “Secondary Forms of Transmission: Teaching and Preaching Philosophy in Thirteenth-Century Provence,” in *Exchange and Transmission Across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism, and Science in the Mediterranean World*, eds. H. Ben-Shammai, S. Stroumsa, and S. Shaked (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, forthcoming). Fortunately, increasing scholarly attention has been directed toward “vernacular philosophy” in recent years. See, for example, Eleazar Gutwirth, “Medieval Romance Epistolarity: The Case of the Iberian Jews,” *Neophilologus*, 84, no. 2 (2000), 207-24; Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed: A 15th Century Spanish Translation by Pedro de Toledo (Ms. 10289, B.N. Madrid)*, ed. Moshe Lazar (Culver City: Labyrinthos, 1989); and Yehudah Halevi, *Book of the Kuzari: A Book of Proof and Argument in Defense of a Despised Faith: A 15th Century Ladino Translation (Ms. 17812, B.N. Madrid)*, ed. Moshe Lazar (Culver City: Labyrinthos, 1990).

how genres other than the standard philosophical treatise played just as important a role in the articulation of philosophical ideas and probably an even greater role when it came to disseminating such ideas. Too often the study of medieval Jewish philosophy focuses on content as if it existed independent of form, thereby marginalizing issues of genre, aesthetics, and literary creativity. By putting such issues at the center, however, we can not only ascertain the relationship between philosophy and literature but also examine the ways in which the structure of a philosophical treatise contributes to the main argument.

### Philosophical Dialogues: Generic and Formal Features

In terms of their generic form and structure, Jewish philosophical dialogues do not differ significantly from their non-Jewish counterparts. Philosophical dialogues written by either Jews or non-Jews tend to consist of a series of exchanges, between at least two distinct characters, which revolve around any number of philosophical issues (e.g., ontology, metaphysics). Conventionally, these exchanges take place between a master and a disciple (e.g., William of Ockham's *Dialogue between a Master and Disciple on the Power of the Emperor and the Pope*, Johannes Scotus Erigena's *Periphyseon*, ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae*, and Halevi's *Kuzari*), various allegorical figures (e.g., Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Augustine's *Soliloquies*, and Abravanel's *Dialoghi*), or representatives of various monotheisms (e.g., Ramon Llull's *Book of the Gentile and the Three Sages*, Peter Abelard's *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian*, and the beginning of Halevi's *Kuzari*). Most dialogues have a clear victor, whose ideas often correspond closely to those of the author. Some of these dialogues are highly literary, with the exchanges between characters essential to the author's conception of philosophy.<sup>5</sup> Other dialogues, however, show very little interest in the genre's structure and form, using the dialogue as a vehicle for discursive exposition.

There exist many reasons behind a philosopher's use of the dialogue form. These involve everything from the desire to popularize and disseminate technical philosophy<sup>6</sup> to the portrayal of a polemical exchange between the

<sup>5</sup> See Kenneth Seeskin, *Dialogue and Discovery: A Study in Socratic Method* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 1-7.

<sup>6</sup> In Jewish thought, the best example of this is the work of Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (ca. 1225-95). See, in particular, his *Iggeret ha-Vikuah* and *Sefer ha-Mevagesh*. The former has been translated into English by Steven Harvey as *Falaquera's Epistle of the Debate*:

author's reading of philosophy or religion and antagonistic views.<sup>7</sup> On one level, we can read many of these dialogues as primers to introduce a popular or broad audience to philosophy using a narrative that was not overtly technical. Within this context, both Halevi and Abravanel—who most likely would have been influenced, *inter alia*, by the Farabian and Averroistic traditions, respectively—would have considered dialogue as belonging to discursive disciplines such as rhetoric, sophistic, poetry, and dialectic. The goals of these disciplines were to form convictions and refute errors by means of persuasion.

An additional, though not unrelated, reason why a philosopher might employ the dialogue's formal characteristics is to respond directly to other works composed in the same genre. In many ways, this is what we witness in the two dialogues under discussion here. It is certainly no coincidence that Halevi and Abravanel composed their dialogues in cultural contexts wherein non-Jews tended to express philosophical ideas using this genre. In al-Andalus, various Islamicate subcultures, for example, the Isma'ilis, used dialogues to disseminate their esoteric understanding of religion. In the Renaissance, humanists employed the genre to develop and expound a highly theoretical and sublimated notion of love as a cosmic principle. These ideas—religio-intellectual esotericism, a philosophical understanding of love—were expressed almost exclusively using the dialogue form. That Halevi and Abravanel wrote dialogues of their own, then, is significant and it becomes necessary to analyze the *Kuzari* and the *Dialoghi* within their larger intellectual, aesthetic, and formal contexts.

It is important, however, not to reduce these two dialogues simply to instances of literary dueling. In responding to non-Jewish dialogues, both thinkers used the genre to develop novel and unprecedented articulations of Judaism: the *Kuzari* being one of the most popular treatises in Jewish thought devoted to particularism, and the *Dialoghi* representing one of the earliest Jewish reactions to Renaissance ideals, especially those of love. Because both Halevi and Abravanel respond to non-Jewish dialogues, their works, as I shall show below, make interesting use of the generic features witnessed in contemporaneous dialogues. For example, the king in the

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*An Introduction to Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); and part of the former has been translated by M. Herschel Levine as *The Book of the Seeker by Shem Tob ben Joseph ibn Falaquera* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Examples from Jewish thought include Halevi's *Kuzari*, Isaac Polleqar's (fl. mid-fourteenth century) *Ezer ha-Dat*, and Moses Mendelssohn's (1729–86) *Phaedon*.

*Kuzari* undergoes initiation at the beginning of the work as opposed to the end, as is customary in Isma'ili texts. And whereas Isma'ilis employed the generic characteristics of dialogue to show an individual's initiation into religio-intellectual gnosis, Halevi has an entire country convert to an exoteric understanding of Judaism. In like manner, Abravanel's decision to make one of his two characters, Sophia,<sup>8</sup> a female is a novel departure from other Renaissance dialogues,<sup>9</sup> as is the fact that it is she, not the male character (Philo), who most fully embodies the Renaissance ideal of not relying on ancient authority. Moreover, Abravanel also uses the flirtatious conversation between the two characters to embody the very topic of their conversation, that is, philosophy.

### Contextualizations: From Judah to Judah

Before proceeding, it would be worthwhile to recap briefly the plot structures of the two dialogues. The *Kuzari*, as is well known, begins with a king who has been repeatedly informed by an angel that his religious intentions (Ar. *niyyāt*) are pleasing to God but his actions (Ar. *a'māl*) leave much to be desired.<sup>10</sup> To rectify this unbalanced relationship, the king seeks to embrace a religion; to this end, he invites a philosopher,<sup>11</sup> a Christian, and a Muslim

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that Sophia, "wisdom," has not been personified in other dialogues, whether Jewish or non-Jewish. What is interesting in Abravanel's account, however, is the fact that Sophia also takes on very human features and subsequently engages in erotic and flirtatious banter with Philo.

<sup>9</sup> See the comments in Abraham Melamed, "The Woman as Philosopher: The Image of Sophia in Judah Abravanel's *Dialoghi*" [Hebrew], *Madaei ha-Yahadut*, 40 (2000), 113-30. I would like to thank Professor Melamed for both calling this article to my attention and sending me an offprint of it.

<sup>10</sup> Judah Halevi, *Kitāb al-radd wa al-dalīl fi al-dīn al-dhalīl*, ed. David H. Baneth and Haggai Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 1:1. A problematic English translation may be found in *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 35. For the sake of convenience, future citations will be from the book and section of the Judeo-Arabic edition of Baneth and Ben-Shammai, with the page number from the English translation in parentheses. See the helpful comments in Robert Eisen, "The Problem of the King's Dream and Non-Jewish Prophecy in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 3 (1994): 231-47.

<sup>11</sup> In this regard, the philosopher uses a number of terms that we would consider to be "religious." For example, he speaks of purifying the soul, the world of the angels, and eternal life. See the comments in Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Science and the *Kuzari*," *Science in Context* 10, no. 3 (1997): esp. 497-501.

to his court, presumably representing the three main purveyors (or, depending upon the perspective, enemies) of contemporaneous spiritual truths. Satisfied by none of their claims and despite his initial *intention* (*niyya*), the king decides to *act* (*amala*) and invite a Jew. So impressed is he by this Jew, a rabbi, that he decides to convert his entire populace to Judaism.<sup>12</sup> The remainder of the dialogue revolves around the conversation between the king and the rabbi on issues including the error of the philosophers, cultic practices, and the spurious beliefs of the Karaites.

Abravanel's dialogue, on the other hand, does not have nearly as dramatic an introduction as Halevi's. His dialogue, reflecting the literary ideals of the Renaissance,<sup>13</sup> is much more stylized. It is, in essence, the conversation between two individuals, Philo and Sophia, two courtiers, who discourse on the nature of love as both a cosmic and a sensual principle. Many of the dialogic exchanges that take place between Philo and Sophia are very playful, with Philo, on one level, either answering Sophia's questions about love or responding to her criticisms; yet, on another level,

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<sup>12</sup> The dialogue itself is loosely based on the "discovery" of the kingdom of the Khazars. In the middle of the tenth century, emissaries from Khorasan came to Cordoba and there told Hasdai ibn Shaprut (912-61), an important adviser to the Muslim caliph Abd al-Rahman III, about the Jewish kingdom of Khazaria. The existence of a mysterious kingdom located somewhere in the East in which Jews held power would have undoubtedly had a tremendous effect on Jewish self-understanding since Jews had not held any type of political power since the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE. On the correspondence between Hasdai ibn Shaprut and the king of the Khazars, see *Letters of Jews Through the Ages: From Biblical Times to the Middle of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Franz Kobler, 2 vols. (New York: East and West Library, 1953), 1:97-116. On the history of the Khazars, see Kevin Alan Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1999); Norman Golb and Omeljan Ptisak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982); and Peter B. Golden, *Khazar Studies: An Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars*, 2 vols. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980), vol. 1.

<sup>13</sup> For a recent attempt to rethink terms that we take for granted in Renaissance studies, including the very term "renaissance," see Christopher S. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians, and Latin's Legacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), for example, xi-xx. On the nature and importance of the Renaissance, for example, Celenza remarks: "Here we enter into problems, especially if we consider the questions that social historians have justifiably been asking for a long time. For it is undeniably the case that, even if some of the cultural forms that the Renaissance inspired made their way eventually to many segments of society... the movement was one predominantly created and shared by Europe's socioeconomic elites and more specifically by its intellectuals. In this sense, the key problem has to do with both the social function and the importance of intellectuals" (*ibid.*, xviii).

he physically desires Sophia and wishes to consummate this desire. Abravanel, thus, cleverly and artfully weaves the philosophical principles of love and desire into the formal structure of his *Dialoghi*.

Both Halevi and Abravanel seem to have had distinct audiences in mind when they wrote their dialogues. Halevi, for instance, wrote for an audience that he thought was convinced of the merits brought about by the Judeo-Arabic synthesis. This synthesis was an attempt to graft Judaism onto a series of vocabularies and philosophical categories popular among Arab elites. His goal, on the contrary, was to demonstrate to his readers that such a synthesis was tantamount to religious and cultural suicide: framing Judaism in foreign categories undermined the essence of Judaism, making it little more than a watered down version of another religion. Abravanel, on the contrary, was convinced of the merits of such a synthesis, only his frame of reference was not Arabic philosophy and belles-lettres, but humanist literature associated with the Italian Renaissance. His *Dialoghi*, then, are meant to convince his implied audience of the merits of reading Judaism in foreign terms. This was an audience, after all, that seems to have been struggling with the new intellectual paradigms associated with the Renaissance, but was undoubtedly uncomfortable with the often overtly Christianizing elements in such paradigms. Abravanel's work shows not only the intellectual merits of Renaissance humanism but also that it need not be defined primarily as a Christian movement.

Halevi and Abravanel thus present two distinct responses to non-Jewish cultures.<sup>14</sup> Although Halevi was deeply entrenched in the Judeo-Arabic

<sup>14</sup> Biographical accounts of Halevi may be found in Shlomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 6 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 5:448-68; Goitein, "Autographs of Judah Halevi from the Genizah" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz*, 25 (1956), 393-412; D. Z. Baneth, "Some Remarks on the Autographs of Judah Halevi and the Genesis of the *Kuzari*" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz*, 26 (1957), 297-303; Hayyim Schirmann, "The Life of Judah Halevi," in *Studies in the History of Hebrew Poetry and Drama* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1979), 1:250-341; and Moshe Gil and Ezra Fleischer, *Judah Halevi and His Circle: 55 Geniza Documents* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2001).

For requisite biographical material on Abravanel, see Menachem Dorman, "Judah Abravanel: His Life and Work" [Hebrew], in *Sichot 'al ha-Ahavah: Leone Ebreo (Giuda Abravanel)*, ed. and trans. M. Dorman (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1983), 13-95. Other treatments include B. Zimmels, *Leo Hebreus* (Breslau: n.p., 1886); S. H. Margulies, "La famiglia Abravanel in Italia," *Rivista israelitica*, 3 (1906): 97-107, 147-54; Heinz Pflaum, *Die Idee der Liebe Leone Ebreo: Zwei Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie in der Renaissance* (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1926), 55-85; Carl Gebhardt, *Leone Ebreo*



culture of his day, at the age of fifty he recoiled from this culture's universalism and began to develop new intellectual and aesthetic forms of particularism.<sup>15</sup> Abravanel, on the other hand, writing after the upheavals of 1492,<sup>16</sup> not only tried *not* to make Judaism so "other" but also tried to show how it represented the core of Renaissance thought, which prided itself on its universalism, especially as developed in the concept of *prisca theologia*, or the "ancient wisdom" encountered in all religions, including Judaism.<sup>17</sup>

Rarely, if ever, do doubts surface regarding the Jewish nature of Halevi's *Kuzari*, a work that is generally considered to be one of the finest examples of the particularist strain resonating in Jewish thought. In broad strokes, Halevi responds to the dominant Arabo-Islamic ideas (everything from philosophy to prosody) of his day and offers in their place what he considers to be authentic Jewish ones that instead focus on both the uniqueness of the Israelite historical record and the ineffability of authentic Jewish experience. The same case, however, cannot be made for Abravanel's *Dialoghi*,<sup>18</sup> a work whose relationship to Jewish thought is tenuous at best.<sup>19</sup>

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(Heidelberg: n.p., 1929); and A. R. Milburn, "Leone Ebreo and the Renaissance," in *Isaac Abravanel: Six Lectures*, ed. J. B. Trend and H. Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 133-57. A synthetic account of these secondary sources may be found in Aaron W. Hughes, "Abrabanel, Judah," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (plato.stanford.edu/entries/abrabanel).

<sup>15</sup> On Halevi's experimentation with prosodic alternatives to Andalusí secular poetry, see Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Ambiguity and Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 94-106.

<sup>16</sup> As Moshe Idel cautions, however, the tragedy of the Spanish exiles did not necessarily alter radically the dynamics of Jewish culture, especially as found in Italy. See his "Religion, Thought, and Attitudes: The Impact of the Expulsion on the Jews," in *Spain and the Jews: The Sephardic Experience, 1492 and After*, ed. Elie Kedourie (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 123-39; and Idel, "Encounters Between Spanish and Italian Kabbalists in the Generation of the Expulsion," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World: 1391-1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 189-222.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972); and Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 2: esp. 720-2.

<sup>18</sup> Abravanel, *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. Santino Caramella (Bari: Gius. Laterza and Figli, 1929). For an English translation, see *The Philosophy of Love (Dialoghi d'Amore)*, trans. F. Friedeberg-Seeley and Jean H. Barnes (London: Soncino Press, 1937). In subsequent citations, I give the book and page number from the Italian edition and put the page number from the English translation in parentheses.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Lesley, for example, writes: "[T]he *Dialogues of Love* by Yehuda Abravanel has attracted more attention from historians of Jewish philosophy than its influence on later Jewish thought deserves." See his "Proverbs, Figures, and Riddles: The *Dialogues of Love* as

Collette Sirat, for example, argues that this work “was written in a secular language and represent[s] a book of profane philosophy. This is not a work of Jewish philosophy, but a book of philosophy written by a Jew.”<sup>20</sup>

Whereas other works of Jewish philosophy, with the possible exception of ibn Gabirol’s (d. ca. 1058) *Fons Vitae*,<sup>21</sup> also written as a dialogue, were composed largely for Jewish audiences, Abravanel composed his *Dialoghi* in Italian in Latin characters. He composed this for an audience that would have included both his co-religionists versed in this language and also, it seems primarily, non-Jews.<sup>22</sup> Abravanel, in other words, never hesitated to

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a Hebrew Humanist Composition,” in *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History*, ed. Michael Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 204.

<sup>20</sup> See Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 408. I completely disagree with this statement and contend that, if there does exist such a phenomenon as a “canon” of Jewish philosophy, then we would have to include the *Dialoghi* in it for a number of reasons: (1) the self-identification of each of the textual protagonists as Jewish (e.g., Abravanel, *Dialoghi*, 3:239, 351 [280, 418]); (2) Abravanel’s interpretation of the classical themes of Judaism (e.g., creation, revelation, redemption) in the light of contemporaneous non-Jewish philosophical categories; (3) his desire to show both the explicit correspondence between the Hebrew Bible and Greek myth, including how the latter was a plagiarized version of the former (e.g., *Dialoghi*, 3:291 [345]); (4) his engagement with the earlier Jewish philosophical tradition (e.g., *Dialoghi*, 3:367-75, 382-7 [438-44, 456-62]); and (5) his subsequent role in speculation about the natural world in seventeenth-century Jewish thought.

<sup>21</sup> The original language of this work is most likely Arabic; it was subsequently translated into Hebrew as *Meqor Hayyim* and into Latin as *Fons Vitae*. When Shem Tov ibn Falaquera translated the work into Hebrew, he seems to have concluded with Abraham ibn Da’ud (ca. 1110-80) that “perhaps if [the *Fons Vitae*’s] contents were refined, [ibn Gabirol’s] words could be included in [a treatise that is] less than one tenth of that treatise.” See Abraham ibn Da’ud, *The Exalted Faith*, trans. Norbert M. Samuelson (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986), 40. So, despite the fact that Falaquera wrote several philosophical dialogues of his own, he did not retain this form in his translation but simply summarized the main points.

<sup>22</sup> There is some debate in the secondary literature as to the *Dialoghi*’s original language of composition. Those who argue for a Latin original point to the fact that he was a physician and would have known Latin, as well as a phrase by Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo (1595-1655) in his *Mikhtav Abuz* that suggests that he was going to translate Abravanel’s work from Latin. Those who argue for a Hebrew original point to another phrase by Claudio Tolemei (1492-1556), which says that Abravanel composed his language in *sua lingua* (his own language). Although, as others have pointed out, such a phrase could quite easily refer to “his own style.” The relevant passage may be found in Barbara Garvin, “The Language of Leone Ebreo’s *Dialoghi d’Amore*,” *Italia*, 13-15 (2001): 185.

Much of the secondary literature debates how a Jewish refugee from Portugal (and then Spain) could show such facility with Italian, let alone the dialect of Tuscany, a region of Italy that Abravanel himself never seems to have visited. However, an Italian original for the

present Judaism to a non-Jewish audience and in such a manner that it was naturally in accord with the teaching of the Renaissance. In this regard, the intended audience of the *Dialoghi* is the exact opposite of Halevi's *Kuzari*, a work—also written in the vernacular (Arabic) but in Hebrew characters—that was highly critical of non-Jewish culture, and that was meant solely for Jewish readers.

### The “Kuzari” and “Dialoghi d'amore” as Responses to Non-Jewish Dialogues

An examination of the immediate non-Jewish intellectual cultures reveals that certain groups in both eleventh-century al-Andalus and sixteenth-century Italy used dialogues to articulate their own religious and intellectual programs. This would have a tremendous impact on Jewish intellectual circles. We can, thus, envisage philosophical dialogues composed by Jews as formal, aesthetic, *and* philosophical responses to non-Jewish dialogues. In this regard, the real commonality between the *Kuzari* and the *Dialoghi* resides not so much in their content or even in their genealogy, but in their confrontation with larger trends in non-Jewish thought and literature.

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work need not seem so surprising given the following: (1) many Italian printers of the early-sixteenth century “Tuscanized” Italian according to set criteria (see Garvin, “The Language of Leone Ebreo’s *Dialoghi d'Amore*,” 194); (2) all the manuscripts, including Mariano Lenzi’s edition of 1535, are in Italian; (3) it seems that Abravanel had lived in Italy for close to twenty years by the time that he wrote the *Dialoghi*; (4) neither later Jewish authors, for example, Azaria de’ Rossi (e.g., *Me’or Einayim*, ed. David Cassel (Vilna: n.p., 1886), 10), nor non-Jewish authors, for example Tullia d’Aragona, had any reason to suspect that it was written in a language other than Italian; and, (5) finally, if we assume the later date of 1511-12 for the composition of the *Dialoghi*, then many non-Tuscan Italian authors of this period called for the adoption of Tuscan as a literary language, owing primarily to the fact that this was the language of Petrarch (1304-74) and Boccaccio (1313-75).

Of particular interest is Pietro Bembo (1470-1547), a contemporary of Judah Abravanel and someone who also wrote an important dialogue of love. In his *Prose della Volgar Lingua*, Bembo made the case that Italian writers of his generation should write in Tuscan rather than in other dialects. See Bembo, *Prose della Volgar Lingua* (Padova: Liviana, 1955). Although he did not compose this work until 1525, he nevertheless wrote sometime between 1497 and 1502 his *Gli Asolani*, itself a dialogue on love, in Italian, and which was subsequently published in 1505. This was one of the earliest examples of a prose work written in Italian. This, in turn, was intimately related to the emerging role of Tuscan nationalism. In this regard, also see Mario Sansone, *Da Bembo a Galiani: Il Dibattito sulla Lingua in Italia* (Bari: Adriatica, 1999), 24-36.

*Halevi, the Isma'ilis, and the "Kuzari" as a Dialogue of Subversion*

As far as Judah Halevi is concerned, one of the most pernicious subcultures in Islamic civilization was that of the Isma'ilis, a religious group whose allegorization of the law (*shari'a*), reading of traditional religion through Neoplatonic lenses, and emphasis on a gnosis meant for an initiated elite proved especially attractive to both Muslim and Jewish intelligentsia.<sup>23</sup> Isma'ilis used dialogue in at least two ways. The first was to refute those hostile to their particular interpretation of Islam. This was done by recounting real or imagined disputations (*munāẓarāt*). Probably the best-known example of this is *Kitāb al-'alām wa al-nubuwwa* by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca. 935).<sup>24</sup> This dialogue recounts the debates between the author and the "atheistic" physician/philosopher, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī. This use of the dialogue to recount a religious or theological disputation would also become popular among non-Isma'ili Muslim works, such as al-Shahrastānī's *Kitāb al milal wa al-nihal*, especially in the debate between the primordial monotheists (*al-ḥunafā'*) and the Sabians (*al-ṣābi'a*).<sup>25</sup>

In addition to this disputative function of the dialogue, Isma'ili authors appreciated the form's dialectical component. This allowed them both to elucidate and clarify certain topics that were central to the movement and to communicate esoteric topics to like-minded individuals. A number of Isma'ili dialogues, for instance, include textual oaths (*'ahd*), which appear to be narrative homologues of what went on in the actual secret sessions

<sup>23</sup> S. M. Stern, "Fāṭimid Propaganda Among Jews According to the Testimony of Yefet b. 'Alī the Karaite," in *Studies in Early Ismā'ilism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Leiden: Brill, 1983), esp., 84-7. Stern makes the important point that we should not assume that all those associated with the Isma'ili movement were as high minded and as interconfessional as the "Ikhwān al-Ṣafā" (Brethren of Purity). Many Isma'ilis seem to have aggressively engaged in polemics to show others the incorrectness of their beliefs. On Isma'ili missionary activity, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 186-96; Josef van Ess, *Chiliasmische Erwartungen und die Versuchung der Göttlichkeit der Kalif al-Ḥākim (386-411 A.H.)* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977); and Daniel H. Frank, *Search Scripture Well: Karaite Exegetes and the Origins of Jewish Bible Commentary in the Islamic East* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), 204-47.

<sup>24</sup> Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-'alām wa al-nubuwwa* (Jinīf: Al-Mu'assasah al-'arabiyya li al-taḥdith al-fikrī, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> *Kitāb al milal wa al-nihal*, 2 vols. (Cairo: n.p., 1948), 2:117-201. Interestingly, though, al-Shahrastānī was accused by others of harboring Isma'ili sympathies.

(*majālis al-ḥikma*) of various groups.<sup>26</sup> Within this context, such dialogues take the place of the actual “sessions” and work in such a manner that they convey the secret, inner dimensions of the Qur’ān, the law, and reality itself. Important dialogues that work in this manner include *Kitāb al-‘ālim wa al-ghulām* by Ja‘far ibn Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. 914)<sup>27</sup> and *Kitāb al-munāẓarāt* by Ibn al-Ḥaytham (d. ca. 950).<sup>28</sup>

Dialogues, thus, proved to be very popular among various Islamicate subcultures (e.g., Isma‘ilis, Jews, philosophers)<sup>29</sup> and, with a few exceptions, were used exclusively by them. To appreciate fully the *Kuzari*, it becomes necessary to situate it within this broader milieu. I contend that Halevi was familiar with these Isma‘ili dialogues and that he composed his own dialogue to confront these other works on their own terms.

As mentioned above, Halevi begins his *Kuzari* with a dream sequence in which an angel appears to the Khazar king informing him that the intentions (*niyyāt*) behind his religious orientation are appropriate but that his ritual actions or devotions (*a‘māl*) are not. These two technical terms form the centerpiece of the beginning of the treatise, and it is the dissonance between them that informs Halevi’s desire to compose the work. In the first three pages in the Arabic edition, these terms are mentioned no fewer than eight times.<sup>30</sup>

As articulated in Isma‘ili works, in particular their dialogues, we learn that the *a‘māl* of Islam are the various religious observances and obliga-

<sup>26</sup> Heinz Halm, “The Isma‘ili Oath of Allegiance (*‘ahd*) and the ‘Sessions of Wisdom’ (*majālis al-ḥikma*) in Fatimid Times,” in *Medieval Isma‘ili History and Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 91-115.

<sup>27</sup> An Arabic text and English translation may be found in Ja‘far ibn Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue*, ed. and trans. James Morris (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> An English translation may be found in *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shi‘i Witness*, ed. and trans. Wilfred Madelung and Paul E. Walker (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> A good example of a philosophical dialogue is Avicenna’s *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, a dialogue on which Abraham ibn Ezra modeled his own *Ḥay ben Meqitz*. See the comments in Aaron W. Hughes, “A Case of 12th-Century Plagiarism? Abraham ibn Ezra’s *Ḥay ben Meqitz* and Avicenna’s *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*,” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 55, no. 2 (2004): 306-31.

<sup>30</sup> For example: “[The angel] said to [the king]: ‘Your intention (*niyya*) is pleasing to God, but your action (*amal*) is not.’ Yet he was so zealous in the cult of the Khazar religion, and with a pure and sincere *niyya* he devoted himself to the *a‘māl* of the temple and the offering of sacrifices. Yet the angel came again at night and said to him: ‘Your *niyya* is pleasing, but your *amal* is not.’” Halevi, *Kuzari*, 1:1 (35).

tions revealed through the divine law (*sharīʿa*) and incumbent upon all Muslims (e.g., prayer, fasting, almsgiving). It is the goal of the *dāʿī* (a philosophically informed religious missionary), however, to encourage initiates to journey beyond simple observance to contemplate the spiritual truths (*ḥaqāʾiq*) that exist behind such actions. Not coincidentally, most Ismaʿīlī treatises also begin with an elucidation of the differences between intentions and actions. For the sake of convenience, I shall focus on al-Yaman's *Master and the Disciple*. At the beginning of this treatise, we encounter the following exchange:

**Seekers:** You have liberated us by helping us to know an affair (*amr*) [of such great importance] that we are obligated to show our gratitude to you for three reasons: our thanks to you for having called us to that [religion]; our thanks for the knowledge (*ʿilm*) to which you directed us; and our thanks for the works (*aʿmāl*) you ordered us to perform. So explain to us what one ought to do who wishes to show his thankfulness. . . . Then inform us about the rights and duties that are obligatory for us among the ordinances of religion (*ḥudūd al-dīn*); and about what is obligatory for the seeker in his questioning, and for the person who is sought, in his responding to that. And let us know as much as you can easily express about the ways of the righteous and the proper behavior (*adab*) of the seekers.

**The knower:** Now the affair to which I called you all is that which God has bestowed as an honor for His servants. . . . [What follows] are the way-stations of “the people of true understanding” (Qurʾān 2:269; 3:7, etc.).<sup>31</sup>

Al-Yaman's treatise works on the assumption that the seeker already understands and performs the proper religious works but that he lacks the proper spiritual intentions that lead to an understanding of the secrets behind such actions. At the beginning of al-Yaman's dialogue, in complete contrast to the *Kuzari*, the master informs the disciple that his actions are fine but that his intentions are all wrong because they are those of the ignorant.<sup>32</sup> The rest of the narrative witnesses the disciple's initiation into the spiritual tradition and the subsequent change in his intention.

Because Halevi inverts both the relationship between and the importance of *niyya* and *ʿamal*, it is important to examine how he deals with these concepts on the level of the *Kuzari*'s form. Not surprisingly, he makes interesting use of the generic features employed by the Ismaʿīlīs in their

<sup>31</sup> Al-Yaman, *The Master and the Disciple*, 63.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Yaman, *The Master and the Disciple*, 75.

dialogues. For instance, and as already mentioned, he recounts what he considers to be the proper relationship between the two concepts numerous times in the opening pages of the work. Within this context, none of the delegates—the philosopher, the Muslim, or the Christian—can answer the king's query about the appropriate relationship between action and intention.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, unlike Isma'ili esotericism, which tends not to take revelation at face value, the Khazar king takes the literal contents of his dream/revelation very seriously, and it is for precisely this reason that the subsequent dialogue unfolds. Finally, unlike Isma'ili dialogues which often culminate in conversion at the end of the narrative, we are informed of the Khazar king's conversion at the very beginning of the *Kuzari*. Interestingly, and also breaking with the expectations that we find in Isma'ili texts, at the end of the *Kuzari* we witness the rabbi—the person supposed to be doing the “initiating”—transforming his own views on the relationship between *niyya* and *'amal*. As far as I am aware, the person doing the initiating in Isma'ili texts never undergoes such a transformation.

The Khazar king, then, converts to Judaism and subsequently undertakes a series of conversations with the rabbi, whereas the Isma'ili dialogues are contingent on an initiate undergoing a series of spiritual exercises to learn about esoteric matters and only *after* this can the initiate have the proper intention.<sup>34</sup> Unlike Isma'ili initiates, the Khazar king already possessed the proper *niyya* before his conversion. What Judaism offers him, though, is the proper physical and bodily practices to bring his actions into harmony with his intentions. The king must learn to grasp that religious truth, the harmony between intention *and* action, is located on the literal level of scripture.

The Isma'ilis connected the relationship between action and intention to that between the outer or exoteric (*ẓāhir*) form of religion and its inner or esoteric (*bāṭin*) core. This dichotomy did not refer simply to the dual level of the Qur'ān and its proper interpretation but was also conceived to encompass all levels of reality. We see this clearly, for example, in *The Master and the Disciple*, wherein a disciple who has just received an oath of initiation (*'ahd*) is subsequently instructed into these esoteric secrets. In a

<sup>33</sup> The philosopher mocks the king's query by stating that: “God does not know you, much less your intentions or actions (*niyyāt wa a'māl*).” Halevi, *Kuzari*, 1:1 (36). The Christian and the Muslim, however, do not even mention action.

<sup>34</sup> This might also stem from the fact that whereas the Khazar king changes religions, the Isma'ili initiates move from one sect of Islam to another.

lengthy monologue describing these secrets we encounter the following statement:

**The knower:** It is the same way with the outer (*ẓāhir*) aspects of the religious paths and all other things: they only subsist through the inner, spiritual religion (*dīn al-bāṭin*), because it is their light and their essential meaning. . . . Nor does the inner aspect subsist except through the outer aspect, because that is its covering and the sign pointing to it. Now the outer aspect is the distinctive mark of this lower world, which can only be seen through that; and the inner aspect is the distinctive mark of the other world, which can only be seen through that.<sup>35</sup>

Implicit in the distinction between the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin* is the need for a spiritual guide who can help the initiate negotiate the mysteries and various gradations of reality. On one level, then, we can read the Ismaʿīli dialogue as a textual replacement for the physical presence of an actual *dāʿī*. The text, in other words, functions as a guide, and the master-disciple relationship recounted in the dialogue becomes a metaphor for the text and the reader.<sup>36</sup> For this reason, the text itself takes on the attributes of the *ẓāhir/bāṭin* distinction:

**The knower:** Now our speaking about this could go on and be greatly expanded. But when one is speaking of wisdom, because of its preciousness and the purity of its substance, the longer one's reply is, the more the point becomes hidden; the later part makes you forget the beginning. For part of the light of wisdom can obscure another part, just as the light of the sun veils and weakens the light of the moon and the stars.

**The young man:** But don't you see that in this lower world—in which He created those creatures whose essence is so marvelous, so immense in their sheer numbers, from the first to the last—people differ concerning it?

**The knower:** . . . No one ever really condemns this lower world except for the totally ignorant.<sup>37</sup>

For Halevi, the distinction between the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin* is an artificial one; in its place, he emphasizes not the inner or esoteric dimension of the law, but its external fulfillment. In book 2, for instance, the rabbi claims that

<sup>35</sup> Al-Yaman, *The Master and the Disciple*, 83.

<sup>36</sup> See Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 40-2, 61-4.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Yaman, *The Master and the Disciple*, 84.



“he who accepts the commandments without scrutiny or argument is better off than he who investigates and analyzes.”<sup>38</sup> This theme is picked up in book 3, a book that is critical of those opposed to the pious acts of the believer.

**The king:** I have speculated about your authority (*amrakum*) and understand that God desires your survival (*ibqā kum*), and that He appointed the Sabbaths and the holy days (*al-asbāt wa al-ā'yād*) among the strongest means of preserving your spark and luster. . . . All of these are divine commandments that are incumbent upon you (*kullihā awāmir ilāhiyya mu'aqqada 'alaykum*). . . .

**The rabbi:** The best (*al-khayr*) among us fulfills the precepts from this divine law (*al-sharī'a al-ilāhiyya*)—circumcision, Sabbaths, holy days, and the legal necessities (*lawāzim al-mashrū'*) that come from God. He refrains from forbidden marriages, using mixtures in plants, clothes and animals, keeps the years of release and jubilee, avoids idolatry or the search for knowledge (*ṭalab 'ilm*) without prophecy by means of *urim ve-thummim* or dreams. He does not listen to the soothsayer, astrologer, magician, augur, or necromancer. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Whereas Isma'ili dialogues are interested in analyzing the appropriate *bāṭin*-based understanding of such actions, Halevi is content to allow such actions to remain at the *ẓāhir* level. In other words, the pious and observant individual should have no need to inquire into the mystical and esoteric properties of divinely revealed rituals. The fact that they are divine and revealed from heaven should suffice for such an individual. Later on in book 3, the rabbi elaborates on this point in response to the Khazar king's question about the Karaites.

**The king:** I would now like you to tell me about the Karaites and their beliefs, which seem more pious (*al-ta'abbud akthar*) than those of the Rabbanites. I have heard that their arguments are superior and better (*arjah wa-akthar*) when it comes to [understanding] the literal level of the Torah (*nuṣūṣ al-taura*).

**The rabbi:** Did I not already say that arbitrariness (*al-taḥakkum*), rational discernment (*al-ta'aqqul*), and conjecture (*al-takharruṣ*) concerning the Law (*al-sharī'a*) do not lead to the pleasure of God? If this were the case then dualists (*al-thanawīyya*), materialists (*al-dahriyyūn*), worshippers of spirits (*ashāb al-rūḥāniyyāt*), those who withdraw to mountain tops (*munqitā'ūn fī al-jibāl*), and those who burn their children (*awlādahum bi'l-nūr*) all desire to approach God. We have, however, said that one cannot approach God except by His commands (*awāmir Allah*).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Halevi, *Kuzari*, 2:26 (106).

<sup>39</sup> Halevi, *Kuzari*, 3:10–11 (142–3).

<sup>40</sup> Halevi, *Kuzari*, 3:22–3 (161–2).

The commandments are holy because they form the core of divine revelation, not because they are subject to esoteric manipulation by any self-styled spiritual elite. Although in the following passage, the rabbi has the Karaites in mind, his criticisms extend to all who prefer to seek out the “true” or spiritual meanings of the commandments as opposed to engaging in their actual observance:

I have already said to you that rational discernment (*al-taʿaqqul*), arbitrariness (*al-tahakkum*), and those who do try to discern religious observances (*ibāda*) for the service of heaven are more diligent (*akthār ijtihādan*) than those who perform the service of God exactly as is commanded (*maʿmūr*). The latter are at ease with their uncritical faith (*istarāḥu taqlīdahum*), and their souls are calm like one who lives in a city and does not fear destruction. The former, however, are like stragglers in the desert, who do not know what may happen.<sup>41</sup>

The *ẓāhir/bāṭin* distinction that forms the pivot around which Ismaʿili cosmology and textual interpretation revolves was one that many Jewish philosophers also found attractive. For instance, the distinction between the body and the soul, outward appearance and inner understanding, formed the foundation upon which much of medieval Jewish philosophy was constructed. In challenging this polarity, Halevi signals his displeasure with the conception of religion among his contemporaries. A true understanding of religion, for him, does not reside in an esoteric dimension that is only loosely connected to what covers it; on the contrary, and paradoxically, Halevi equates the inner dimension of Judaism with the proper action of its outer dimensions.

Even though we can read Halevi’s *Kuzari* as subversive of Ismaʿili dialogues such as *The Master and the Disciple*, we should not overlook the inroads that such a generic *bāṭin*-based spirituality made amongst Andalusī Jews. Within this context, the spokesman for philosophy that we encounter at the beginning of the *Kuzari* best symbolizes this rationally based form of monotheism. This philosopher, for instance, stresses the importance of purifying one’s soul, understanding the sciences and all of their truths (*al-ʿulūm ʿalā ḥaqāʾiqihā*), attaining the level of the angels and ultimately eternal life.<sup>42</sup> In addition to such theoretical knowledge, he emphasizes the importance of proper intention, ethical behavior, and

<sup>41</sup> Halevi, *Kuzari*, 3:37 (168-9).

<sup>42</sup> Halevi, *Kuzari*, 1:1 (37-8).

action. The philosopher's worldview, then, is predicated on purification, knowledge of eternal truths, and salvation. For Halevi, this is much more insidious than the worldviews provided by Christianity or Islam (at least in its non-Isma'ili variety), since the generic type of spiritually infused thought of the philosopher does not require irrational assent to either the incarnation of Jesus or the language of the Qur'an. It is thus not coincidental that Halevi has as his Muslim spokesman a Sunni Muslim, whereas the philosopher espouses many of the ideas traditionally associated with Isma'ili spirituality and philosophy. Unlike Shlomo Pines who claims that the philosopher is modeled on ibn Bājja,<sup>43</sup> I side with Y. Tzvi Langermann, who argues that it is the generic spirituality of the philosopher that both the king and Halevi find so bothersome.<sup>44</sup> The philosopher, then, bears more than a passing relationship to a philosophically informed Isma'ili *dā'i*.

The form of the dialogue thus provided Halevi with a ready-made and convenient form to articulate his own construction of Judaism, one that was the polar opposite of those—whether Isma'ilis or Jews under their sphere of influence (e.g., all of the Andalusī Jewish Neoplatonists)<sup>45</sup>—who employed dialogues to advance their own esoteric claims to religious truth. For instance, whereas the Isma'ilis stressed a quasi-mystical, esoteric take

<sup>43</sup> Pines, "Shī'ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 2 (1980): 211-15.

<sup>44</sup> Langermann, "Science and the *Kuzari*," *Science in Context*, 10, no. 3 (1997): esp. 497-501. Evidence here might also be marshaled from Herbert Davidson, who argues that the views attributed to the philosopher are, for the most part, so imprecise and eclectic as to be impossible to identify with any degree of accuracy. See Davidson, "The Active Intellect in the *Kuzari* and Halevi's Theory of Causality," *Revue des études juives*, 131, nos. 3-4 (1971): 352-74.

<sup>45</sup> Although my main focus here is on Halevi's response to Isma'ili dialogues, ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* provides an example of the influence of Isma'ili thought in Jewish circles. Even though he does not frame the opening of his work using the distinction between *niyyāt* and *a'māl*, let us keep in mind the dramatic opening sections of the *Kuzari* as we read the beginning of ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae*:

**Master:** Thanks to your natural ability and diligence, you possess the requisite strength to proceed in the study of philosophy. Let us begin with you telling me about matters that are dear to your heart, and then we will eventually arrive at the most important question of all, *viz.*, "Why was man created?" The form of our conversation will be the following: question and answer according to the rules of logical disputation.

on religion, Halevi upheld an exoteric reading of the Jewish tradition; whereas the Isma'ilis emphasized the proper intention of religious devotion over its actual praxis, Halevi did the opposite; and whereas the Isma'ilis directed their teachings toward an initiated intellectual elite that was focused on the spiritual authority of the living Imam, Halevi's reading of Judaism was one that stresses the entire Jewish people as the spiritual elite. Breaking sharply with the Isma'ilis, Halevi argues that religious knowledge does not reside in philosophical speculation of secret gnosis, but in the proper observation and performance of the divine commands that God has revealed to the Jewish people:

This will show you that the approach to God is only possible through the medium of God's command, and there is no road to the knowledge of the commands of God except by way of prophecy, but not by means of speculation and reasoning.<sup>46</sup>

*Abravanel, Renaissance Humanism, and the Role of Love and Desire*

The dialogue also proved to be a particularly popular genre for Renaissance humanists, undoubtedly associated with the renewal of Platonic philosophy in the Florentine Academy.<sup>47</sup> Probably the earliest Jewish dialogue of

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**Disciple:** How can we order our questions and answers according to these rules without talking on and on? Perhaps you should clarify matters before this? If you want to follow the rules of logical disputation in all that follows, then the work will be long and the toil great.

See ibn Gabirol, *Sefer Meqor Hayyim*, Hebrew trans. Ya'akov Blubstein (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1926), 3.

Here we encounter none of the dramatic backdrop that we do in Halevi's work. On the contrary, the master informs the disciple that the latter is ready to begin the study of philosophy and that the rules of the game will be those that govern logical disputations. In their subsequent conversation, the disciple constantly feeds convenient questions to the master to move the conversation along. Other sections of the work involve lengthy monologues on the part of the master, in which the disciple becomes little more than a passive recipient of his teachings. We can thus also read Halevi's interesting use of the generic features of the dialogue form in the opening section of the *Kuzari* as offering an alternative, both philosophical and aesthetic, to Gabirol's dialogue.

<sup>46</sup> Halevi, *Kuzari*, 3:53 (183).

<sup>47</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Renaissance Platonism," in *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. Michael Mooney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 48-69; James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 3-26.

the Renaissance—*Hai ha-Olamim* (Eternal Life) by Yohanan Alemanno (ca. 1435-1504)—was composed in this environment sometime in the late quattrocento. Yet, because it seems unlikely that Judah Abravanel ever visited Florence and that he spent much of his time in southern Italy, let me here focus generally on the composition of dialogues in the Kingdom of Naples.

Before Abravanel arrived in Naples,<sup>48</sup> the Aragonese kings there cultivated and employed humanists in a number of capacities.<sup>49</sup> Many of these individuals wrote at least parts of their work using the genre of the dialogue, though in Latin as opposed to the vernacular. For example, Bartolomeo Facio (ca. 1405-57) composed *De humanae vitae felicitate*, which was instrumental in defining certain aspects of human happiness and freedom in the light of Renaissance categories.<sup>50</sup> Lorenzo Valla (1407-57) composed his *De vero falsoque bono* as a dialogue celebrating Epicurean morality and values. Yet the most famous Neapolitan humanist of all, an individual whom Abravanel more than likely knew well, was Giovanni Pontano (1426-1503), who composed at least five dialogues (*Charon*, *Antonius*, *Asinus*, *Actius*, and *Aegidius*). From 1471 until the mid-1490s, Pontano presided over the Neapolitan Academy, which frequently met in his own house and to which the major political, philosophical, and religious thinkers of the day were invited.<sup>51</sup>

Moving beyond the Kingdom of Naples, Renaissance humanists seem to have also found the dialogue useful when it came to articulating a theory of love. Although Marsilio Ficino's commentary to Plato's *Symposium* inaugurated the genre of the treatise on love (*trattato d'amore*) in the Renaissance, it was neither written as a dialogue nor originally composed in the vernacular (although he later translated it into Tuscan).<sup>52</sup> Rather, it

<sup>48</sup> The best short account of Neapolitan history remains Benedetto Croce, *History of the Kingdom of Naples*, trans. F. Frenaye (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>49</sup> On the contemporary constructions of the term "humanism" and "humanist," see the discussion in Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*, 36-9.

<sup>50</sup> Jerry H. Bentley, *Politics and Culture in Renaissance Naples* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 102-3.

<sup>51</sup> Erasmo Percopo, *Vita di Giovanni Pontani*, ed. M. Manfredi (Naples: I.T.E.A. Industrie Tipografiche, 1938), 106-19; Mario Santoro, "La cultura umanistica," in *Storia di Napoli*, 10 vols. (Napoli, 1975-81), 7:159-71.

<sup>52</sup> Ficino, *El Libro dell'amore*, ed. S. Niccoli (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1987); translated in English as *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* by Sears Jayne (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985).

consists of seven orations attributed to various participants who were summoned to a villa at Careggi by Lorenzo de' Medici to commemorate November 7, the day considered to mark both Plato's birth and death. In each oration, a speaker expatiates on one of the speeches made in praise of love by a character in the *Symposium*. The result is essentially the Christianization of Plato's concept of love as a cosmic principle. Similarly, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola also did not compose a *trattato d'amore per se*. But he does examine love and beauty as cosmic principles in his commentary to Girolamo Benivieni's *Canzone d'amore*.<sup>53</sup> Much like Ficino, Pico spends a considerable amount of time in Christianizing ancient myths and terms, including of course many kabbalistic principles.<sup>54</sup>

It is probably no coincidence that the late fifteenth century, just after the dialogues of Plato were becoming available in Italian translation, began to witness the composition of dialogues of love composed primarily in the vernacular. By the sixteenth century, the dialogue on love had become a very popular genre.<sup>55</sup> Well-known examples include those by, *inter alia*, Giuseppe Betussi (1523-60),<sup>56</sup> Sperone Speroni (1500-88),<sup>57</sup> and Tullia d'Aragona (ca. 1510-56).<sup>58</sup> This genre was, in turn, related to the emerging ideal of creating a pure Italian literary language.<sup>59</sup> Yet many of the treatises associated with this genre were not particularly philosophical. Although influenced by the Platonic notion of Love—which emphasized

<sup>53</sup> Pico della Mirandola, *Commento sopra una Canzone d'amore* (Palermo: Novecento, 1994).

<sup>54</sup> See Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), esp. 121-85.

<sup>55</sup> This century also witnessed the publication of an influential theoretical work entitled *Discourse on the Art of Dialogue* by Torquato Tasso, which explains the use of dialogue in terms of plot, style, subject matter, use of characters, and so on. It also shows to just what extent non-Jewish thinkers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries not only employed but also thought theoretically about the role, function, and nature of dialogue. See the comments in Lesley, "Proverbs, Figures, and Riddles," 220-1.

<sup>56</sup> "Il Raverta—Dialogo di messer Giuseppe Betussi nel quale si ragiona d'amore e degli effetti suoi," and "La Leonare," in *Trattati d'amore del Cinquecento*, ed. Giuseppe Zonta (Bari: G. Laterza & figli, 1912), 3-145, and 307-48.

<sup>57</sup> "Dialoghi d'amore," in Sperone Speroni, *Opere*, ed. Mario Pozzi, 5 vols. (Rome: Vecchiarelli, 1989), 1:1-45.

<sup>58</sup> "Della infinità di amore," in *Trattati d'amore del Cinquecento*, 187-247.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Gabriella Cantini Guidotti, *Tre Inventari di Bicchierai Toscani fra Cinque e Seicento* (Florence: Presso l'Accademia della Crusca, 1983); and Claudio Giovanardi, *La Teoria Cortigiana e il Dibattito linguistico nel Primo Cinquecento* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1998).

its metaphysical principles, while denigrating its more sensual or physical aspects—many tended to be fairly popular, focusing primarily on the courtly ideal of love.<sup>60</sup>

It is precisely within this milieu that we must situate Judah Abravanel, who, as I argued above, does not so much rebel against these non-Jewish dialogues as present a more decidedly Jewish alternative to them. Unlike Renaissance belletrists who composed dialogues, Abravanel tends to be more theoretical and philosophical. And, unlike the work of Renaissance philosophers, Abravanel's *Dialoghi*, while espousing most of the same themes, presents them in a much more literary and engaging style. For example, the love that Philo feels for Sophia frames the dialogue and serves as a leitmotiv running throughout the three dialogues.<sup>61</sup> As a result, the philosophical discussion of love, desire, and beauty is embodied in the various interactions of the main characters. Abravanel, thus, succeeds in creating a treatise on love that works on a number of different levels, with the main characters of his dialogue functioning as points of entry into increasingly abstract philosophical discussions.

Abravanel also departs from earlier thinkers when it comes to the philosophical ideas expressed in the work. For example, whereas Ficino's work is primarily confined to commenting on Plato's *Symposium* and Pico's to the work of Benivieni, Abravanel's *Dialoghi* provides a comprehensive analysis of love, addressing many features that are not included in the works of Plato, Ficino, or Pico. In the following passage, for example, Abravanel faults Plato (and presumably, by extension, Ficino) for confining his philosophical exploration of love simply to the human level and, in the process, ignoring the discussion of God's love:

**Philo:** Plato in his *Symposium* discusses only the kind of love that is found in men, which has its final cause in the lover but not in the beloved (*la sorte de l'amore che negli uomini si truova, terminato ne l'amante ma non ne l'amato*), for this kind mainly is called love, since that which ends in the loved one is called friendship and benevolence. He rightly defines this love as a desire of beauty. He says that such love is not

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Pietro Bembo, *Gli Asolani* (Florence: Accademia della Crusca, 1991). An English translation may be found in *Gli Asolani*, by Rudolf B. Gottfried (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954).

<sup>61</sup> E.g., Abravanel, *Dialoghi* 1:5-6; 2:61-2; 3:171-2, 391 (3-4, 67-8, 197-8, 468). In this regard, see Naomi Yavneh, "The Spiritual Eroticism of Leone's Hermaphrodite," in *Playing with Gender: A Renaissance Pursuit*, ed. Jean R. Brink, Maryanne C. Horowitz, and Allison P. Coudert (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 85-98.

found in God, because that which desires beauty and does not have it is not beautiful, and God, who is the highest beauty, does not lack beauty nor can he desire it, whence he cannot have love, that is, of such a kind (*Tale amore dice che non si truova in Dio, però che quel che desia bellezza non l'ha né è bello, e a Dio, che è sommo bello, non gli manca bellezza né la può desiare, onde non può avere amore, cioè di tal sorte*).<sup>62</sup>

In this passage, Abravanel intimates that an overreliance on Plato will not give us a proper account of love. In terms of the formal characteristics of the dialogue, he also does this by making Sophia, the female character, unwilling to accept Philo's constant reliance on "all the great ancient authorities" (*tanti eccellenti antichi*).<sup>63</sup> Through subsequent dialogic exchanges with Sophia, Philo emerges as a medieval thinker, beholden to the chain of traditional philosophical authority. Sophia, on the contrary, is someone unwilling to accept such authority and who instead puts emphasis on the unaided human intellect. Sophia, thus, emerges as the symbol of the new mode of thinking associated with Renaissance humanism.<sup>64</sup> We witness this, for example, in the following exchange:

**Sophia:** Has this ancient saying that "nothing can be made out of nothing" any other reason in its support than the approval and agreement of the ancients?

**Philo:** If it had no other reason in its favor, it would not have been known and accepted by so many worthy ancient thinkers.

**Sophia:** Give me this reason, and let us cease discussing ancient authority.<sup>65</sup>

Related to the above notion of providing a more comprehensive theory of love, we encounter, near the end of the third dialogue, the concept of "the circle of love," *il circolo degli amari*, an important feature that is lacking in the thought of Ficino, Pico, and other *trattatisti* (i.e., those individuals who composed *trattati d'amore*).<sup>66</sup> This circle begins with the divine, whose love creates and sustains the universe:

<sup>62</sup> Abravanel, *Dialoghi*, 3:217-18 (254).

<sup>63</sup> E.g., Abravanel, *Dialoghi*, 3:222-4, 241 (259-62, 283).

<sup>64</sup> Melamed, "The Woman as Philosopher," 129.

<sup>65</sup> Abravanel, *Dialoghi*, 3:241 (283).

<sup>66</sup> Abravanel, *Dialoghi*, 3:377 (450). The source of this concept has been the subject of some debate. According to Suzanne Damien, Abravanel would have derived this from Ficino by way of the Alexandrian mystics, especially Pseudo-Dionysius. See her *Amor et intellect chez Léon l'Hébreu* (Toulouse: E. Privat, 1971), esp. 162ff. Leo Zimmels sees in it a kabbalistic influence. See, in particular, his *Leone Hebreo, Neue Studien* (Wien: n.p., 1892), 39. Joseph



**Sophia:** I understand how this wondrous circle is made whole by passing through each degree. And although you told me of this before, in another connection, such delight and satisfaction does it bring to my mind that it is ever new to me. Now will you not show me the circle of love in their several degrees. For this is the true subject of our discussion.

**Philo:** ...[E]ach degree of being with paternal love procreates its immediate inferior (*causa la produzione del suo succedente inferiore*), imparting its being or paternal beauty to it, although in a lesser degree as is only fitting.<sup>67</sup>

This emanative framework, the love of that which is more beautiful for that which is less beautiful, makes up the first half of the circle. Everything in the universe exists on a hierarchical chain of being, from the pure actuality of the divine to the pure potentiality of prime matter. Just as the superior desires the perfection of the inferior, the inferior desires to unite with the superior. The first half of the circle spans from God to utter chaos, whereas the second half of this circle works in reverse. It is the love of the inferior for the superior, predicated on the former's privation and subsequent desire to unite with the superior. As far as the individual is concerned, the highest felicity resides in the union with God, which the Italian describes erotically as *felice copulativa* ("union" in the sexual and erotic sense):

Because the love of the human soul is twofold, it is directed not only towards the beauty of the intellect, but also towards the image of that beauty in the body. It happens that at times the love of intellectual beauty is so strong that it draws the soul to cast off all affection for the body; thus the body and soul in man fall apart, and there follows the joyful death in union with the divine.

*[Essendo adunque l'amor de l'anima umana gemino, non solamente inclinato a la bellezza de l'intelletto ma ancora a la bellezza ritratta nel corpo, succede qualche volta che, essendo*

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Klausner argues that it comes from ibn Gabirol. See his "Don Yehudah Abravanel and His Philosophy of Love" [Hebrew] *Tarbiz*, 3 (1933): 94. Moshe Idel, however, faults the last two for offering no sources. In contrast, he claims, quite plausibly, that Abravanel's source is al-Batalyawsi, perhaps as received from his father's commentary to Genesis or from Yohanan Alemanno. See Idel, "The Source of the Circle of Love in the *Dialoghi d'amore*" [Hebrew], *Iyyun*, 28 (1978), 156. I should also like to add to this conversation that we find as early as Proclus, who lived in the fifth century, the notion of mutual attraction of the imperfect to the perfect, and the perfect to the imperfect. See, for example, Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 668, 53-4.

<sup>67</sup> Abravanel, *Dialoghi*, 3:378 (451).

*grandemente tirata da l'amore de la bellezza de l'intelletto, lassa del tutto l'amorosa inclinazione del corpo, tanto che si dissolve totalmente da quello e ne segue a l'uomo la morte felice coppulativa*<sup>68</sup>

This theory of sensual love will also affect how Abravanel envisages this world. Once again, we see differences when we compare him to other *trattatisti*. Abravanel celebrates this world, describing it as the primogeniture of God, the male principle, and intelligible beauty, personified as a female. Since this world is intimately connected to God, it cannot be negated, but rather must become part of the path that leads the soul back to God. Sensual objects, thus, become mimetic representations of celestial beauty.

Abravanel, according to the passages cited above and others, seeks to provide a more comprehensive theory of love than those of his contemporaries. Whereas Ficino and many other *trattatisti* who follow in his footsteps equate human love with sensual love between humans, Abravanel resignifies human love as that which individuals have for God.<sup>69</sup> This has important repercussions since many of the *trattatisti* denigrated sensual love, identifying it with animality, thereby ignoring "the existence of emotional, psychological, and aesthetic factors" in such love.<sup>70</sup> For example, Baldassarre Castiglione argues that sensual lovers experience pleasures similar to those enjoyed by irrational animals.<sup>71</sup> In like manner, Mario Equicola claims that all sensual love is ultimately sullied by the "filth of coitus."<sup>72</sup> Abravanel, on the other hand, celebrates sensual love as the gateway to cosmic or spiritual love. Such love, for him, becomes that which orientates the individual toward the Divine. The goal of Abravanel's system is to ascend through the cosmic hierarchy; to accomplish this, one must first

<sup>68</sup> Abravanel, *Dialoghi*, 2:195-6 (227).

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Abravanel, *Dialoghi*, 1:52; 3:183, 226-9 (57, 212, 264-8). See Bernard McGinn, "Cosmic and Sexual Love in Renaissance Thought: Reflections on Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Leone Ebreo," in *The Devil, Heresy, and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), 191-209.

<sup>70</sup> Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love: The Context of Giordano Bruno's Eroici furori* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 70.

<sup>71</sup> Castiglione, *Il Cortigiano*, 3rd ed. (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1929), 4:liii, 476-7. For requisite secondary literature, see Peter Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier: The European Reception of Castiglione's Cortegiano* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), esp. 19-38.

<sup>72</sup> Equicola, *Libro di natura d'amore*, ed. Laura Ricci (Rome: Bulzoni, 1999), 71.

enter through the gate provided by the sensual enjoyment that one derives from physical objects.<sup>73</sup>

Once again, Abravanel also articulates his philosophical ideas using the generic features of the dialogue. By developing elaborate theoretical arguments to connect cosmic and sensual love, Philo seeks to convince Sophia that by physically consummating her relationship with him, she will gain a deeper understanding of the true meaning of love. Sophia, not to be caught off guard, constantly thwarts Philo's intentions by constantly asking him more and more questions.<sup>74</sup> For example:

**Sophia:** If you wish to leave me contented, you will tell me more about this.

**Philo:** It is too late for such a narration. It is the hour for you to rest your gentle person, even though my mind continues its vigilance.

This humorous exchange is indicative of Abravanel's desire to develop a theory of love that is not simply sublimated. The sexual innuendo and tension between Philo and Sophia mirror on the level of genre the ideas expressed in the work's contents.

Abravanel also establishes a ground for these discussions on love in Jewish sources. On one level, this involves accusing Plato, and by extension Renaissance thinkers, of plagiarizing Jewish sources (e.g., the myth of the Androgyne).<sup>75</sup> More philosophically, however, Abravanel discusses love as based on the relationship that God has with Israel. In so doing, he invokes the Maimonidean discussion concerning the intellectual love of God as the supreme human activity, in addition to Crescas's understanding of God as the ultimate Lover. Near the end of the work, Philo locates this discussion in the biblical narrative:

[D]ivine pleasure is the perfect union (*perfetta unione*) of the image of God with himself, and of his created universe with himself as creator, of which David says, "Let the Lord rejoice in his works" (Ps 104:31). For in this union of creator with created (*unione de la creatura col creatore*) consists not only the pleasure and salvation of the created, as

<sup>73</sup> See the comments in Aaron W. Hughes, "Transforming the Maimonidean Imagination: Aesthetics in the Renaissance Thought of Judah Abravanel," *Harvard Theological Review*, 97, no. 4 (2004): esp. 477-9.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Abravanel, *Dialoghi*, 1:58 (64). In this regard, see the comments in Melamed, "The Woman as Philosopher," 125.

<sup>75</sup> Abravanel, *Dialoghi*, 3:291 (345).

David says, "We will rejoice in the supreme author of our salvation," but also the pleasure of God relative to the happiness of his creatures (*ma ancora consiste in quella unione la divina dilettazone relativa per la felicità del suo effetto*). Be not amazed, therefore, that God should rejoice, for he is the highest pleasure of the universe, and by reason of the eternal love of his beauty the highest pleasure must reside in him, proceed from him, and be directed towards him (*per l'eterno amore de la sua medesima bellezza bisogna che in lui, da lui e a lui sia somma dilettazone*). As the ancient Israelites would say "Blessed is he in whom joy has its habituation" (bKet 8a).<sup>76</sup>

Abravanel is not content to show, as some of his medieval predecessors did, that the Bible when read properly (i.e., allegorically) reveals the same truths of philosophy. Although he certainly reads the Bible allegorically, here he grounds the rhetorical standards of the age in the biblical narrative, whose pleasing and beautiful literal narrative is part of its divine message. Whereas many medieval philosophers discarded the poetic language of the Bible to uncover its philosophical core, Abravanel implies that poetic and allegorical language is part of the philosophical enterprise, as his entertaining allegorical dialogue between Philo and Sophia well indicates.

## Conclusions

Both the dialogues of Judah Halevi and Judah Abravanel make full sense not when compared with each other, but only when foregrounded against their larger non-Jewish literary and philosophical contexts. Once we do this, we realize that the dialogue becomes part and parcel of the actual content of each work. The very form, and not just what is expressed in it, competes with influential dialogues in the non-Jewish world. However, as we have seen, Halevi's and Abravanel's responses are by no means equivalent: the former's is introspective, reacting negatively against Islamicate culture to illumine an authentic Jewish experience grounded in the uniqueness of the Jewish people that is ascertained through the historical record; the latter's, on the contrary, embraces the thought of the Renaissance and try to show how humanistic ideals are most fully embodied not in the Christianizing agenda of individuals like Pico and Ficino, but in the universalism afforded by the Jewish tradition.

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<sup>76</sup> Abravanel, *Dialoghi*, 3:382-3 (456-7). This passage is taken almost verbatim from Crescas's *Or ha-Shem*. See Warren Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1998), 114.

For Halevi, Judaism at its most authentic is a tradition that turns inward, that revels in its own particularity, itself grounded in the uniqueness of a specific people, a specific land, and a specific historical record. Abravanel, on the contrary, mentions nothing about the particularities of Jewish existence. For him, Judaism is a universal religion, one whose central text, the Bible, is the lifeblood that nourishes both Classical and Renaissance ideals.

In formulating their responses to the larger cultures in which they found themselves, both relied on the form of the dialogue to articulate fully their own cultural, intellectual, and religious concerns. The decision to write in the form of a dialogue, I have argued, was not haphazard. Rather, both relied on this form either to reject or accept *certain* features of their larger intellectual environments. Both composed their main works, the *Kuzari* and the *Dialoghi d'amore*, respectively, in response to dialogues that were being written in their contemporaneous non-Jewish environments. As such, both offer distinctly Jewish responses to subvert or counter certain ideas and trajectories in these larger environments.

Although this study has primarily focused on two specific Jewish dialogues—Halevi's *Kuzari* and Abravanel's *Dialoghi*—I have maintained throughout that they represent but two examples of a larger literary trend in the history of Jewish thought. Based on my analysis of these two works, it is evident that, on a local level, this form enabled Jewish thinkers to articulate their own philosophical (or antiphilosophical) positions, while at the same time permitting each thinker to raise and ultimately refute objections to his arguments. Yet, on a deeper level, it also becomes readily apparent that Jewish dialogues were often responses to specific, contemporaneous non-Jewish dialogues, which, in turn, mirrored larger cultural, religious, and intellectual environments. On this level, Jewish thinkers adopted and adapted this form in order to provide responses to mediate various tensions by grounding them in Jewish texts and worldviews. In these responses, we witness the intersection among philosophical, formal, and aesthetic concerns and how this constellation of concerns ultimately contributed to the production of Jewish philosophy.

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